

## Iqbal and the Challenge of Reform within the Muslim World

Chandra Muzaffar\*

**Abstract:** Fundamental to Iqbal's reconstruction of religious thought was his challenge to Muslims to understand *tawhīd* and to re-think their entire concept of, and approach to, Islam. He pleaded for the return of the spirit of *ijtihād* in the interpretation of the law. He was impressed by Western civilization's passion for self-consciousness, social justice and egalitarianism though he distanced himself from its atheistic strain and from the ideas that were a hindrance to the spiritual and moral advancement of the human being. Iqbal abhorred imperialism, democracy and race-based nationalism. He equally attacked the fossilised religious dogmatism that had sapped the spirit of Islam. Iqbal sketched a blue print of a polity to give life and meaning to *tawhīdic* values.

This essay is divided into four parts. The first part discusses some of the key elements in Iqbal's reforms. In the second part, we try to assess the impact of these reformist ideas upon the thinking of twentieth century Muslims. The third segment of the essay seeks to explain why Iqbal's reforms have had such a limited appeal within the Ummah (the Muslim community). In the fourth and final part we reflect upon the future of reformist thinking within the Muslim world based upon present trends.

### Reforms

To describe Muhammad Iqbal as an Islamic reformer is to state the obvious. Iqbal was more than just a reformer. In the words of the distinguished Muslim thinker, Fazlur Rahman, Iqbal was "the most daring intellectual modernist the Muslim world has produced."<sup>1</sup> Iqbal's boldness was evident in his clarion call to Muslims to re-think their entire concept of, and approach to, Islam. Only if there was a fundamental re-think could Muslims meet the challenges of the contemporary age. Traditional theological systems were in no position to satisfy the intellectual yearnings of the modern mind. As Iqbal put it, "Nor can the concepts of theological systems draped in the terminology of practically dead metaphysics be of any help to those who happen to

---

\* Dr. Chandra Muzaffar is President of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST). E-mail: muza@po.jaring.my

possess a different intellectual background. The task before the modern Muslim is therefore immense. He has to re-think the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past."<sup>2</sup> Critical of stultifying, suffocating theological dogma, he wanted Muslims, "equipped with penetrative thought and fresh experience" in order to "courageously proceed with the work of reconstruction before them."<sup>3</sup>

Fundamental to Iqbal's reconstruction of religious thought was his challenge to Muslims to translate the principle of *tawhīd* - the essence of faith itself - into the praxis of living. For centuries, the conventional '*ulamā*' had presented *tawhīd* to the Muslim masses as some refined theological concept remote and removed from their daily struggles. Iqbal sought to make *tawhīd* "a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind."<sup>4</sup> The Oneness of God for him meant the oneness of life itself - the integration of the political, economic, social, cultural and other dimensions of human existence into an organic unity through spiritual and moral values rooted in a transcendent truth. In this way, Iqbal put "God back in the world, now with us, facing our problems from within, creating a new and better world with us and through us."<sup>5</sup>

By making *tawhīd* real, Iqbal, in a sense, endowed loyalty to God with a dynamic, new meaning or rather restored the meaning that early Muslims attached to God. In his words, "And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature."<sup>6</sup> Through this linkage between *tawhīd* and man's ideal nature, Iqbal revolutionised the meaning of faith and the purpose of life. He broke down the barrier that conservative religious thought had erected separating the spiritual from the material, the eternal from the temporal, and the sacred from the secular. In Islam, Iqbal argued,

the spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains, and the nature of an act, however secular in its import, is determined by the attitude of mind with which the agent does it. An act is temporal or profane if it is done in a spirit of detachment from the infinite complexity of life behind it; it is spiritual if it is inspired by that complexity.<sup>7</sup>

He further elucidated on this nexus between the spiritual and the material by pointing out that,

[T]he ultimate reality, according to the Qur'ān, is spiritual, and its life consists in its temporal activity. The spirit finds its opportunities in the natural, the material, the secular. All that is secular is therefore sacred in the roots of its being. The greatest service that modern thought has rendered to Islam, and as a matter of fact to all religions, consists in its criticism of what we call material or natural - a criticism which discloses that the merely material has no substance until we discover it rooted in the

spiritual. There is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realisation of spirit. All is holy ground. As the Prophet so beautifully put it: 'The whole of this earth is a mosque.'<sup>8</sup>

This then is the intellectual foundation of Iqbal's reformist ideas: a reinterpretation of *tawhīd* as a dynamic principle of living; the total integration of the spiritual and the material, the sacred and the secular; the infusion of spiritual and moral values into each and every aspect of life. With this as the backdrop, we shall now examine specific issues of reform that concerned Iqbal.

### The State

Iqbal's concept of *tawhīd* had a strong bearing on his vision of the state. Since the essence of *tawhīd* "as a working idea is equality, solidarity and freedom," the "state from the Islamic standpoint, is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realise them in a definite human organisation."<sup>9</sup>

The state, for Iqbal, was therefore primarily a vehicle for the pursuit of universal moral ideals. It was a view that he remained faithful to till the end of his days. This is a point about Iqbal that is worth emphasising over and over again because there is sometimes a tendency in certain circles to view his advocacy of a homeland for the Muslims as an exclusive project. Iqbal never equated his idea of a polity with a particular religious or cultural community. While he wanted to see Muslim culture and the *sharī'ah* flourish within the Muslim areas of India so that Muslim identity would be preserved, Iqbal was firm in his belief that, "All men and not Muslims alone, are meant for the Kingdom of God on earth, provided they say goodbye to their idols of race and nationality and treat one another as personalities."<sup>10</sup>

### Law

If his vision of the state was closely related to moral values and ideals, Iqbal's concept of law embodied a clear notion of justice and equity. Some of the '*ulamā*', he felt, had failed to show how the foundational principles of Islamic jurisprudence very often sought to establish justice and equity in the relations between human beings and between the people and the state. Instead they had given the impression to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike that the religion was preoccupied with penalty and punishment. In the hands of the conservative '*ulamā*', Islamic law appeared to be static and dogmatic.

To break out of this cocoon of conservatism, Iqbal pleaded for the return of the spirit of *ijtihād* (independent judgement) in the interpretation of the law. He saw some merit in “the claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to reinterpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life....”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, “the teaching of the Qur’ān that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors should be permitted to solve its own problems.”<sup>12</sup>

It is in the context of his attitude towards *ijtihād* that one should try to understand Iqbal’s endorsement of the Religious Reform Party of Turkey and the stand of the Grand Vizier. He was forthright in emphasising that,

The only alternative open to us, then, is to tear off from Islam the hard crust which has immobilised an essentially dynamic outlook on life, and to rediscover the original verities of freedom, equality and solidarity with a view to rebuild our moral, social and political ideals out of their original simplicity and universality. Such are the views of the Grand Vizier of Turkey. You will see that following a line of thought more in tune with the spirit of Islam, he reaches practically the same conclusion as the Nationalist Party, that is to say, the freedom of *Ijtihād* with a view to rebuild the law of Shariat in the light of modern thought and experience.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, Iqbal was very much aware that the re-interpretation of some of the legal principles of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah may have some other motive: to adjust fundamental Islamic teachings to the vagaries and vanities of modern life. This is why he chided certain Turkish intellectuals for misunderstanding the role and purpose of *ijtihād*. Nonetheless, he was full of praise for the new republican Turkey for challenging dogmatic thinking. As Iqbal observed in his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*:

The truth is that among the Muslim nations of today, Turkey alone has shaken off its dogmatic slumber, and attained to self-consciousness. She alone has claimed her right of intellectual freedom; she alone has passed from the ideal to the real - a transition which entails keen intellectual and moral struggle.<sup>14</sup>

With hindsight, we now realise that Iqbal’s enthusiasm for some of the legal reforms taking place in Turkey was perhaps misplaced. He could not have known that the inspiration for these changes, especially in the case of the Turkish leader, Kamal Atatürk, was not the Qur’ān but the Western model of progress which Iqbal had, on numerous occasions, criticised and condemned. But because he was so deeply committed to the transformation of the Muslim world, he was prepared to welcome

what seemed to be - at least at that point in time - a genuine endeavour to improve the administration of law and justice in Turkey.

### The West and Islam

This brings us to what was undoubtedly one of Iqbal's major concerns - the relationship between the West and Islam. More than perhaps most other Muslim intellectuals before and after him, Iqbal was well-versed in Western philosophy. He was familiar with the writings of Goethe, Fichte, Nietzsche, Bergson and Marx, among others.<sup>15</sup> Students of Iqbal have pointed out that some of their ideas helped shape Iqbal's own intellectual world view.

Iqbal himself acknowledged some of the strengths of Western civilisation. The importance accorded in that civilisation to self-consciousness and the assertion of the "individual will" caught his eye. He was even more impressed by the passion for social justice and egalitarianism which he saw in socialist thought - though at the same time he distanced himself from its atheistic strain.<sup>16</sup> His tribute to Lenin in the often quoted poem *Lenin Khuda Kay Hudhur Mein* (Lenin before God) and his criticism of the predatory characteristic of capitalism through *Karl Marx Key Awaz* (The Voice of Karl Marx) are evidences of this.

But Iqbal's works taken as a whole show that he found the West a hindrance to the spiritual and moral advancement of the human being. A principled champion of the freedom and dignity of the Muslim and Indian masses, Iqbal was an unrelenting critic of Western imperialism. In poem after poem he assailed the West European colonial powers for their subjugation and enslavement of non-western societies. Using the Italian aggression against Abyssinia as a case in point, he lamented,

The law of Europe placidly and without contest,  
Allows wolves to devour lambs  
A new order must be established in the world,  
A solution cannot be hoped for  
From those who pillage coffins.<sup>17</sup>

He was also deeply wounded by the injustice of British imperialism in Palestine. He asked in a poem,

If the Jews have a right to the land of Palestine  
Why have not the Arabs a right to Spain?  
The aim of British imperialism is somewhat other  
Than a question of oranges, honey or dates.<sup>18</sup>

It was partly because of the evil of imperialism that Iqbal rejected what he regarded as the hypocrisy of Western democracy. In a memorable poem he observed,

The democracy of the West is the same old organ,  
Which strikes the self same note of Imperialism;  
That which those regard'st as the fairy Queen of Freedom  
In reality is the demon of autocracy clothed in the garb of deception.  
Legislation, reforms, concessions, rights and privileges  
In the materia medica of the West are but sweet narcotics.  
The heated discussion of assemblies  
Are the camouflage of capitalists.<sup>19</sup>

For Iqbal democracy was not just a weapon of imperialism and capitalism; it was hollow and superficial because it "is a certain form of government in which men are counted but not weighed."<sup>20</sup> He believed that the main flaw in the democratic system was its "failure to place value upon the ability and quality of the people and to value instead only their quantity."<sup>21</sup>

If Iqbal abhorred imperialism and democracy, he was equally scathing in his attack on race-based nationalism which he viewed as a pathology spawned by Western civilisation. The worship of race or nation invariably led to the oppression of other races and other nations. Iqbal was also of the view that the West was overly materialistic and lacked the qualities of heart. He once said, "love is dead in the West, because thought has become irreligious."<sup>22</sup>

In his denunciation of the West, Iqbal was at times excessive. There was a tendency to indulge in sweeping generalisations and blanket indictments. But what redeemed him were the equally strong attacks he launched against the foibles and fallacies that prevailed in the Muslim societies of his time. As we have seen, he often bemoaned the fossilised religious dogmatism that had sapped the spirit of Islam. The factionalism and sectarianism that divided and fragmented Muslims saddened him. He knew that this was one of the primary causes of the weakness of the Ummah. The Muslims of India were, moreover, steeped in superstition and held on to outmoded beliefs about the supernatural which were contrary to Islam itself. Iqbal, the reformer, did not spare his own people when it came to correcting these and other shortcomings.

### **Unity and Universalism**

Reforming the Muslims had many aims; one of which was to make them realise that Islam was a universal religion "which envisaged all humanity as a unity."<sup>23</sup> We have already caught a glimpse of Iqbal's universalism. It is important to reiterate that it was a universalism which

was not confined to the Muslim Ummah - meaning by which the global unity of all Muslims. He sought "to string together the separated beads of the rosary."<sup>24</sup> As the scholar Riffat Hassan puts it, "In the name of an all-embracing principle of human love, the poet urges his compatriots to transcend cultural and religious boundaries, attaining true freedom:

In love is hidden Liberty, if only you could see  
And bondage is discrimination between you and me.<sup>25</sup>

In a number of patriotic poems which he penned for both children and adults, Iqbal expressed his faith in a truly non-communal transcendent unity that would bind Muslims and Hindus. His *Tarana-i-Hindi* (The Song of India), for instance, "remains to this day the best patriotic poem written by any Indian poet in modern times. It comes nearest, in fact, to a truly non-communal national anthem of India."<sup>26</sup>

But the verses that encapsulated Iqbal's universalism - perhaps the finest verses ever written on behalf of the unity of humankind - are to be found towards the end of his magnum opus, *Javid Namah*, addressed to his son. It reads:

Humanity binds men together in fraternity;  
So keep your feet fixed on the path of amity.  
The man of love, who sees men with God's eye,  
Loves heathen and believer equally.  
Give both of them a warm place in your heart  
Woe to the heart, if heart from heart should part.<sup>27</sup>

### **Impact**

Having examined some of Iqbal's leading reformist ideas, we should now assess their impact upon the Ummah. In many parts of the Muslim world, especially in South Asia and in Southeast Asia, it is Iqbal's poetry that is held in high esteem. But his reform-oriented ideas (including those expressed through poetry) are not widely known. Even when they are known, their appeal is somewhat limited.

Of course, in countries such as Pakistan and within segments of the Bangladeshi and Indian Muslim intelligentsia, there is a degree of support and sympathy for some Iqbalian ideas. There are also groups and individuals in Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia and other Muslim majority societies who have always been appreciative of the reformer in Iqbal. The late Ali Shariati, one of the most creative minds that twentieth century Islam has produced, and his compatriot, Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamanei, would be two notable examples. Some of the leaders of the Masjumi, an influential Islamic

party in the turbulent politics of the Indonesia of the fifties drew some inspiration from Iqbal's dynamic approach to Islamic law and the Islamic state.<sup>28</sup> There is also an Iqbal society in Indonesia. In Malaysia, a young intellectual-activist by the name of Anwar Ibrahim organised a seminar on Iqbal in the seventies as a way of generating public interest in the reforms articulated by the great social philosopher.

Significant as this and other efforts were, the fact remains that Iqbal's reforms have not really touched the soul of the Muslim masses. The proof is not hard to find. If one looks at Islamic school syllabi, the contents of Islamic theological texts used in Colleges and Universities, the writings and speeches of those traditional '*ulamā*' who command a great deal of influence within the Ummah, the conventional radio and television programmes on Islam that reach the people, one will discover that there is hardly any reference to Iqbal's reformist ideas and ideals. What this means is that Iqbalian reforms are not part of mainstream Islamic thinking.

That Iqbal, the reformer, wanders on the margins of society is borne out by another, perhaps even more startling truth. The vast majority of Islamic movements that have emerged in different parts of the world in the course of the last three or four decades do not in any way reflect the Iqbalian commitment to social reform.<sup>29</sup> In fact, on certain crucial issues such as the concept of the state or the approach to law, these Islamic movements are diametrically different from Iqbal. Neither do they embody the universalism that was so powerfully expressed in Iqbal's prose and poetry.

In contrast to Iqbal's *tawhīdic* oriented, value-based vision of polity, most Islamic movements today conceive of the state as a rigid, formal-legal structure that imposes Islamic law upon the citizenry. The law itself is often seen in a somewhat crude, mechanistic manner - as an instrument for punitive action, as a weapon to penalise each and every act of transgression. It explains why in the world view of these Islamic movements, *hudūd* - which they interpret as Islamic criminal law - figures so prominently. For some of them, it is what defines an Islamic state.

In such a state, the universal values that Iqbal stood for, needless to say, would carry little weight - even if the proponents of an Islamic state often preach Islamic universalism. If there is anything that distinguishes them, it is their exclusive outlook on religion. Projecting Islam, which of course possesses many unique characteristics, as if it has no affinities with any other religious philosophy has become something of an obsession with some of them. Their idea of Islam is so narrow that often there is very little love and compassion for 'the other.'



This may be one of the reasons why Iqbal's criticism of the West appears to have struck a chord with some of the Islamic movements. Though Iqbal himself never intended it that way, his anti-Western utterances seem to have reinforced the shrill, superficial anti-Western rhetoric of certain Islamic activists. Why such rhetoric persists is linked to the next section of our essay which seeks to analyse the factors behind Iqbal's limited appeal.

### Limited Appeal

One of the more important factors that explain strong anti-Western feelings within segments of the Muslim populace is the fear that Western dominance and Western imperialism will overwhelm Muslim identity and Muslim authenticity. Given the reality of Western global power and its impact and influence within Muslim societies, there is a great deal of justification for this fear.

Muslims, by and large, have chosen to respond to the Western threat by re-asserting their Islamic identity. Re-asserting identity more often than not has come to mean strengthening one's adherence to the forms and practices, the rites and symbols of the religion. Thus, in many parts of the Muslim world, as Western patterns of development, generated to a great extent by Western global dominance, become more pronounced, young Muslims in particular are becoming more and more demonstrative of their fidelity to prayer and pilgrimage, fast and attire.<sup>30</sup>

While an increasing devotion to the practices and symbols of religion is in itself commendable - since it does indicate the importance the Muslim attaches to Islam in his or her daily life - what is regrettable is the inability or unwillingness of most Muslims to go beyond them and live those values and principles which constitute the bedrock of faith. It is this atmosphere prevalent in many Muslim societies, an atmosphere which equates the essence of religious identity with worship and ritual that hampers Muslims from developing a better appreciation of Iqbal's reformist ideas. For Iqbal, as we have seen, sought to bring forth the inner meaning of Islam expressed in its commitment to justice, freedom and solidarity. When a society defines its religious character in terms of the number of mosques it has built or the number of pilgrims who perform the *'umrah*, it cannot be expected to empathise with Iqbal's social ideals.

In this regard, if Iqbal - leaving aside the adulation of his poetry - is venerated in the Muslim world, especially among the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent, it is partly because he is seen as the spiritual

founder of Pakistan, a nation, which, many Muslims at the time of its birth, regarded as the embodiment of an Islamic religious identity. Here again one sees the importance that is attached to identity. What is forgotten is that for Iqbal it was more than a question of identity; the polity he had in mind had to give life and meaning to *tawhīdic* values.

An attachment to religious identity revolving around symbols and practices impedes understanding of, and sympathy for, Iqbal's reforms in yet another sense. Since the guardians of symbols and the interpreters of practices are traditional, conservative '*ulamā*', this notion of identity further strengthens their position and power. The '*ulamā*' become the defenders of identity. As defenders of identity, they would ensure that reform oriented ideas such as Iqbal's would not get past the gates. Keeping Iqbalian reforms at bay is, in a manner of speaking, important for preserving and perpetuating the power and position of the '*ulamā*'.

It is not just the '*ulamā*' or the dominant notion of religion and identity alone that has circumscribed Iqbal's influence. Many present-day Muslim governments would be ill at ease with some of his ideas. When he suggests for instance that "The Islamic form of association in prayer, besides its cognitive value, is further indicative of the aspiration to realise this essential unity of mankind as a fact in life by demolishing all barriers which stand between man and man,"<sup>31</sup> he is pleading for a just and egalitarian social order which is the antithesis of the unjust, unequal and often hierarchical structures that exist in the majority of Muslim polities. Such a powerful espousal of justice through the medium of religion would certainly be perceived by elitist rulers as a challenge to their power.

While the antipathy of ruling elites with their vested interests may have constrained the growth of Iqbalian ideas in a number of Muslim countries, there is no denying that Iqbal himself was also an obstacle of sorts. There are some evidence to show that in certain crucial areas, he did not seem to appreciate what actual reform would entail. For instance, he was, as we have observed, very critical of democracy. At the same time, however, he believed passionately in intellectual freedom. Iqbal perhaps failed to realise that for intellectual freedom to flourish, democracy was a vital pre-requisite, that is, the democracy which he advised Muslims "to flee from" because "human thinking cannot issue out of the brains of two hundred asses."<sup>32</sup> It need not be emphasised that it is only the democratic form of government with all its imperfections which offers some protection to the intellectual non-conformist or dissident.

Iqbal was also somewhat ambivalent about the sort of reform that was essential for elevating the status of women in Muslim society. On

the one hand, he was full of sympathy for the struggle of Muslim women in India, Turkey and the Arab world for justice and equality. On the other hand, he appeared to be hesitant to propose concrete measures which would help women overcome the injustices they frequently encountered in matters such as divorce, maintenance and inheritance - though as a lawyer he was constantly exposed to their myriad grievances. In the end, Iqbal merely chose to moan through his poetry, "I too at the oppression of women am most sorrowful; but the problem is intricate, no solution do I find possible."<sup>33</sup>

If Iqbal had sought justice for women through tangible changes to aspects of traditional Islamic jurisprudence, his impact upon contemporary Muslim society - which is coming to terms with the rights and roles of women as never before - would have been enormous. Likewise, if he had reflected in greater depth about the conditions that are conducive to the nurturing of freedom in society, there might have been more rapport with his writings among the present generation of Muslims - many of whom are engaged in life and death struggles against authoritarianism and oppression.

### **The Future**

Though we have shown that Iqbal's reformist ideas have only limited appeal in today's Muslim world, the question we should nonetheless ask is whether their influence will grow in the future. Or, to put it within a broader perspective, what is the future of Islamic reformist thinking - the thinking represented (apart from Iqbal) by Shah Wali Ullah, Syed Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Malik Ben Nabi, Ali Shari'ati and Fazlur Rahman, among others?

It is not inconceivable that certain trends in the future will help create an environment that is less hostile to, and more hospitable towards, the growth of Islamic reform. The signs are already beginning to express themselves. We shall examine two such possible trends.

Islamic consciousness reflected in the re-assertion of identity through symbols and practices, though still a powerful force, is beginning to wane. It is significant that in states that have been established in the name of the quest for an Islamic identity - the best example of which is the Islamic Republic of Iran - both the intelligentsia and the man-in-the-street are beginning to ask searching questions about the real meaning of an "Islamic state." They are more interested in its substance rather than in its form. They want to know why economic injustices, political suppression and social evils continue to occur in the Islamic state. More

specifically, they are concerned about growing unemployment and escalating inflation; the elite monopolisation of power and the torture of dissidents; the spread of corruption and the decline of integrity in public life. They yearn for a society where equality, freedom and righteousness - the values that Islam promises - are not just esoteric ideals which have no bearing upon the realities that surround the lives of ordinary men and women. It is partly because of their desire for the concretisation of Islamic values through what is real and tangible that such a huge portion of the Iranian populace voted for Mohammed Khatami in the recently concluded presidential election.<sup>34</sup>

It is not just Muslims in Islamic states such as Iran, Sudan or Pakistan who are looking beyond Islamic rhetoric. Islamic movements in other parts of the world too, a little disillusioned with what has been happening in states that have emerged as the flag-bearers of Islam, and somewhat sobered by their own lack of success, are also beginning to move away from slogans and catchy phrases. The indiscriminate use of violence by certain groups in Algeria and Egypt to achieve their political goals which has alienated large sections of the public in these and other countries has also compelled a number of Islamic movements to re-examine their own strategies and objectives. As a result of this soul searching, there is at least some attempt now to re-align means to ends, to re-appraise one's struggle, to acknowledge the weaknesses and shortcomings in one's own approach to Islam.

As Islamic states and Islamic movements become more self-critical, as they become more prepared to admit that there is a gap between ideal and reality, there is a possibility that reform-oriented ideas will slowly take root within Muslim societies. Once Muslims realise, for instance, that the formalism of an Islamic state does not guarantee that the substance of its policies will also be Islamic or just, they will begin to appreciate Iqbal's concept of the state. Similarly, if Muslim activists and ordinary Muslims become less obsessed with their exclusive religious identity, they will be able to understand what Malik Ben Nabi meant when he said that, "Islam...is the science of being human..."<sup>35</sup>

If introspection and reflection within the Ummah is a trend of the future which could lead to the general acceptance of certain reformist ideas, the discernible shift that is now taking place in the global power structure is another trend that is also bound to impact upon Muslim thinking. While it is true that the centres of power in the West remain dominant, it is becoming increasingly apparent that other centres of power are also emerging. The emergence of Japan and now of China, South Korea and ASEAN as major hubs of economic dynamism heralds a new power configuration within the global system. For economic

power could well be the forerunner of political and cultural power. This new power configuration has important implications for Islam's relations with the West.

Any shift in the global power structure which results in a loosening of the West's grip upon the world, would, theoretically at least, allow Muslim states to relocate themselves in the international arena. If they begin to see that the centres of power in the West are no longer as dominant as they once were, Muslim states would be less concerned with what they now perceive as the Western threat to their identity. As this perception of a threat to their identity decreases, it is conceivable that Muslims would begin to focus much more upon the underlying values and principles of Islam rather than the outward forms and symbols of the religion. A change of emphasis in the approach to Islam of this kind, as we have argued, would favour the reformist thinking that Iqbal and others of his ilk stood for.

What this implies is that the emergence of new centres of power in Asia could in the long run create the sort of environment within the Muslim world which would make it more conducive for the growth of reformist ideas. It is, therefore, in the interest of the Ummah itself to encourage Asia along the path of economic, political and cultural empowerment. After all, a significant segment of the Ummah will also be empowered in the process since Asia is the home of the majority of the world's Muslims. And, an economically prosperous, politically stable and culturally secure Ummah, needless to say, will be confident enough to absorb and assimilate reformist ideas. Conversely, is it because there is so much poverty, political instability and cultural insecurity within the Muslim world today that reformist thought, however well grounded it may be in Islamic philosophy, has less of a mass appeal than some simplistic, superficial view of the religion?

Can we, therefore, conclude that Muhammad Iqbal's brave attempt to reconstruct religious thought in Islam - however limited its impact in the past and the present - may yet serve as an inspiration to the unborn future?

### Notes

1. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 234.
2. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (New Delhi: Kitab Publishing House, 1974), 97.
3. *Ibid.*, 179.

4. Ibid., 147.
5. This is a quote from Cantwell Smith that appears in Rajmohan Gandhi, *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter* (New Delhi: Roli Books), 48.
6. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 147.
7. Ibid., 154.
8. Ibid., 155.
9. Ibid., 154.
10. Riffat Hassan, "The Development of Political Philosophy," in *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 149.
11. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 168.
12. Ibid., 168.
13. Ibid., 156-7.
14. Ibid., 162.
15. See Syed Abdul Wahid, *Iqbal: His Art & Thought* (London: John Murray, 1959), especially the chapter entitled "Iqbal & Western Thought."
16. Jan Marek, "Perceptions of International Politics," in *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*.
17. Ibid., 160.
18. Ibid., p. 164.
19. Riffat Hassan, "The Development of Political Philosophy," 155.
20. Jan Marek, "Perceptions of International Politics," 165.
21. Ibid.
22. Freeland Abbot, "View of Democracy & the West," in *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, 177.
23. See Khalifah Abdul Hakim "Renaissance in Indo-Pakistan (Continued): Iqbal," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif, Vol. 2 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1966), 1619.
24. Riffat Hassan, "The Development of Political Philosophy," 139.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Quoted in Javid Iqbal, "My Father," in *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, 64.
28. Yuzril Azha, "Modernisma & Fundamentalisma Dalam Politik: Satu Kajian Perbandingan Kes Parti Masjumi di Indonesia & Jamaat-e-Islami di Pakistan

1940-1960" (Master's Thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, School of Social Sciences, 1993).

29. For a discussion on Islamic movements see Chandra Muzaffar, "Islamic Movements as Agents of Social Change" (Paper presented at the International Conference on Islam & Social Change, Kuala Lumpur, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), June 1996).

30. For an analysis of this phenomenon see Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1987).

31. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 94.

32. Freeland Abbot, "View of Democracy & the West," 175.

33. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter*, 63.

34. It is significant that he polled 69 per cent of the popular vote. *New Straits Times*, May 25, 1997.

35. Malik Ben Nabi, *The Qur'ānic Phenomenon*, trans. Abu Bilal Kirkary (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1991), 184.